

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PRAGUE 02416 231534Z

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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 883

INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, CZ

SUBJECT: EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY OF WARSAW PACT INVASION

1. EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY OF 1968 WARSAW PACT INVASION WAS ALMOST A NON-EVENT. FOR SATURDAY MORNING SHOPPERS THROING THE STREETS UNDER FAIR WEATHER CLOUDS AND BRISK AUTUMN-LIKE AIR, A PRINCIPAL ATTRACTION WAS THE SALE AT CORNER KIOSKS OF SEASONAL WATERMELONS AND OTHER FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES. OTHERWISE, EXCEPT FOR SLIGHT INCREASE OF NUMBER OF PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS AROUND STATUE OF ST WENCESLAUS IN SQUARE WHICH BEARS HI NAME, ANNIVERSARY PASSED WITHOUT INCIDENT. OFFICIAL MEDIA CARRIED NO REFERENCE, HOWEVER OBLIQUE, TO 1968 EVENTS.

2. AUGUST 21 RUDE PRAVO FRONT PAGED A PHOTOGRAPH OF PARTY AND STATE LEADERS -- INCLUDING CZCP GENERAL SECRETARY AND PRESIDENT HUSAK, PRIME MINISTER STROUGAL,
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PAGE 02 PRAGUE 02416 231534Z

FEDERAL ASSEMBLY CHAIRMAN INDRA, PARTY SECRETARY

KEMPNY, CZECH PREMIER KORCAK, AND SLOVAK PREMIER GOLOTKA. IN THE FOREGROUND, HUSAK IS SEEN SIGNING AN ENDORSEMENT OF THE WORLD PEACE COUCIL'S "STOCKHOLM APPEAL" FOR GENERAL AND COMPLETE DIS-ARMAMENT; THE BACKGROUND IS DOMINATED BY A LARGE PORTRAIT OF LENIN. RUDE PRAVO ALSO REPORTS AN AUGUST 20 TOUR D'HORIZON OF BILATERAL AND INTERNA-TIONAL DEVELOPMENTS BY FOREIGN MINISTER CHNOUPEK AND SOVIET AMBASSADOR MATSKEVICH, REPORTEDLY "HELD IN A FRIENDLY AND CORDIAL ATMOSPHERE." THESE ITEMS IN THE PARTY DAILY ORGAN REFLECT THE ABSOLUTE PRIMACY CZECHOSLOVAKIA CONTINUES TO GIVE TO TIES WITH THE KREMLIN ON THE EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1968 INVASION.

3. COMMENT: EMBASSY NOTES AUGUST 20-21 FELL ON FRIDAY-SATURDAY THIS YEAR. IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN 1976 NOTHING IS MORE SACRED THAN THE WEEKEND IN THE COUNTRY. DESPITE GREAT STRIDES WHICH HAVE BEEN MADE IN CONSUMER GOODS SINCE THE LATE SIXTIES, SOME BOTHERSOME FOOD SHORTAGES PERSIST, THOUGH FAR LESS THAN ELSEWHERE IN EASTERN EUROPE. ON THE WHOLE CZECHS ARE RESIGNED TO ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES AS WELL AAS TO THE INVISIBLE PRESENCE OF SOVIET TROOPS ON CZECHOSLOVAK TERRITORY. THEY KNOW THEY HAVE NO CHOICE IN EITHER MATTER, SO THEY PARRY THE INDIGNITIES OF THE SYSTEM IN THEIR OWN TIME-HONORED WAY, BY CONCOCTING JOKES ABOUT IT, BY SEEKING PRIVATE SOLUTIONS UNDER THE TABLE, AND BY DROWNING THEIR SORROWS IN BEER.
BYRNE

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